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## **DPNR nominee moves forward to confirmation**

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The Virgin Islands Daily News

By ALDETH LEWIN Daily News Staff

ST. THOMAS — Senators on Tuesday grilled the governor's pick for Department of Planning and Natural Resources commissioner, Dawn Henry, then approved her nomination and sent it to the full body with a favorable recommendation.

Henry, who previously worked as legal counsel to DPNR, said that taking the helm of the agency for the last 45 days has been a humbling experience.

"DPNR is a challenge," she said.

### **St. John poisoning**

Only eight days into Henry's new position, a Delaware family was poisoned by methyl bromide used at the Sirenusa Resort where they were staying on St. John. DPNR and the Environmental Protection Agency immediately launched a joint investigation.

Since then, DPNR has issued a half-dozen stop use orders for local pest control companies to stop using the restricted chemical.

"I am proud to state that the team met every challenge, and the public can rest assured that all of the methyl bromide that DPNR discovered is now secured and in the department's custody," Henry said.

Some senators wanted to know how a restricted pesticide could be used without DPNR's knowledge.

Henry said the department makes annual inspections, but not of everyone. She said the schedule is rotated, so everyone does get inspected but not every year.

**She said the responsibility to use the chemical in the correct way is on the applicator.**

EPA audit report

Henry also spoke about what she called the “elephant in the room,” a recent Interior Department Inspector General’s audit of the territory’s ability to implement and enforce federal programs under the Environmental Protection Agency.

“The IG report pulls no punches,” she said.

The report found that two of the department’s federal grants are in jeopardy and other programs remain under scrutiny.

“By any measure, this is failure. Failure of leadership,” she said.

She said the report sets out a series of recommendations and corrective actions the department should take by next March.

Henry said her goal is to have those items complete within six months.

Management style

Henry said her management style would be centered on two concepts. The first is that she will be visiting each of the divisions personally to interact with employees on a regular basis.

She said she also will have “office hours” and will encourage any employee who has tried to work up the chain of command to solve a problem to bring it to her directly.

Henry told the senators that she will be an advocate for training, and she said she will not hesitate to terminate an employee who is not performing after training has been given.

Other goals

Henry said staffing levels in her department are too low, and she will make some hires, including an assistant commissioner who will be based in St. Croix.

She will also embark on a crosstraining initiative that she said will help to fill in some gaps.

Other goals Henry discussed are to restructure DPNR’s divisions to consolidate services and to reassign employees to fill vacancies in understaffed divisions.

Henry’s nomination was supported by all seven committee members Tuesday: Jean Forde, Novelle Francis Jr., Justin Harrigan Sr., Neville James, Nereida Rivera-O’Reilly, Janette Millin Young and Kenneth Gittens.

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